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The Princeton Theological Review

a journal by students, faculty, alumni/ae, and friends of Princeton Theological Seminary

that the light of God's truth may shine bright and increase

March 2003

Scripture and the Lordship of Christ

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General Editor
The Princeton Theological Review
Princeton Theological Seminary
P.O.Box 821
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Scripture and the Lordship of Christ

This edition of the Princeton Theological Review has been a long time coming. In the last months this journal has survived a prolonged transitional period during which much thought and discussion has occurred regarding the *PTR*'s purpose and goals. We humbly put forth the 28th issue and foresee a rich future for this publication. As an entirely new editorial staff, we are honored to stand in the tradition of so many gifted women and men who have dedicated their time and energy to the *PTR*. With our inauguration into these positions, it felt most appropriate to begin our time of service by espousing the theme, "Scripture and the Lordship of Christ."

The Word of God has the privilege of being both the moderator in all contemporary theological conversations as well as the authority in critiquing the conclusions of any theological work, regardless of its age, geographical location or establishment in the Christian tradition. In highlighting another aspect of this authoritative nature, Clark Pinnock once noted that "[t]he Bible itself places real limits on the systematic work we can do...We cannot invent new data or eliminate any."¹ Irrespective of varying hermeneutical contexts, Scripture remains an active, living standard.

Along with serving as the primary director in the theological formation process, the Bible facilitates our understanding of who Jesus Christ is. It is in agreement with Thomas' words of wonderment and reverence in John 20:28, "My Lord and my God!" that we assert the Lordship of our Savior.

The three primary contributing authors of this issue stand at different but complementary vantage points for understanding Jesus Christ and the biblical text. Our own professor, Bruce McCormack, presents Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture through explication of the late theologian's understanding of the triune forms of the biblical text. McCormack demonstrates how Barth's understanding of the Bible is analogous in some respects to the doctrine of the Trinity and ultimately grounded in his Christological framework. With this understanding of the method Barth has employed, McCormack's discussion takes an ontological turn to an exploration of the Barthian idea of the Bible's "being-in-becoming." As an inanimate object positioned between the will of God and the will of human interpreters, the Bible becomes the Word of God to the reader when God chooses to reveal

it as so. In this work, McCormack successfully shows that the direct contradiction, often thought to exist between the traditional evangelical conceptions of the doctrine of Scripture and Barth's own understanding of the Bible, is fallacious and unfounded.

Building on the notion of "the missional basis of the Bible," Northern Ireland native Chris Wright employs the all-encompassing *Missio Dei* concept as the key to understanding the Christian paradigm. Following, Wright unlocks the missiological elements of the Old Testament with a focus both on Yahweh's uniqueness and action in the life of Israel as well as the implications of Israel's interplay with other nations. It is through Israel's encounters with Yahweh and other people groups that the chosen nation was shown an eschatological vision that is universal in scope.

Renowned British scholar John Stott derives the authority of Scripture from Christ himself. That is to say, Stott's confidence in the Christian Bible finds its grounding both in Jesus Christ's affirmation of the Old Testament as the cornerstone of his personal life and public ministry and in his anticipation of the New Testament through his relationships with the apostles. As a follower of Christ, the contemporary Christian then must wholly submit to the Text in its entirety. Stott avers that with the acknowledgement of this authority, the Christian is able to flourish in discipleship, service, and humility.

The assertions that these authors put forth regarding this issue's theme extend theological conversations in exceptional ways. The Bible and the Lordship of Christ must remain as central fixtures in all theological development but also in personal transformation. It is our hope that with the emphasis on these two foci in the material below, we can in some small way positively impact hearts and minds here at Princeton Theological Seminary and beyond.

Christina M. Busman
Executive Editor



Note 1 Clark Pinnock, "How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology," in Robert K. Johnston, ed., *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), p. 28.

The Being of Holy Scripture is in Becoming:

Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism

by Dr. Bruce L. McCormack

The statement that "The Bible is God's Word" is a confession of faith, a statement of the faith which hears God Himself speak through the biblical word of man. To be sure it is a statement which, when venturing it in faith, we accept as true even apart from our faith and beyond all our faith and even in face of our lack of faith. We do not accept it as a description of our experience of the Bible. We accept it as a description of God's action in the Bible, whatever may be the experiences we have or do not have in this connexion. But this is precisely the faith which in this way sees and reaches beyond itself and all related or unrelated experiences to God's action, namely, to the fact that God's action on man has become an event, and not therefore that man has grasped at the Bible but that the Bible has grasped at man. The Bible, then, becomes God's Word in this event, and in the statement that the Bible is God's Word the little word "is" refers to its being in this becoming. It does not become God's Word because we accord it faith but in the fact that it becomes revelation to us.¹

My goal in this paper is not to provide you with a comprehensive account of Barth's doctrine of Holy Scripture. Such a thing would not be possible within the limits of this paper. What I am going to do is to focus somewhat narrowly on the phrase I have highlighted in my title - the being of the Bible as the Word of God, as Holy Scripture, is a *being in becoming*. I have chosen this as my focus for two reasons, above all. First, it has long been my sense that the American evangelical reception of Barth's doctrine of Scripture has ultimately foundered on this one point, viz. the claim that the Bible "becomes" God's Word. Surely - or so the evangelical complaint might run - such a claim must open the door wide to "subjectivism" in theology, to the belief that the Bible may be God's Word for us but, if it is, it is so not because it is in itself but only because it has been the occasion for some kind of spiritual experience. Thus, a question is raised about the relation between what the Bible is objectively, apart from any human experience of it, and what it becomes "subjectively" when read and appropriated by human interpreters for their own use.

Now there is, admittedly, another word from Barth's vocabulary that I could have chosen to take as the central focus of my lecture, and that is the word "witness." The Bible is, according to Karl Barth, the "primary witness" to revelation but not revelation as *such*. American evangelicals have often worried that such claims would erode a much needed distinction between the prophets and apostles and the rest of us who come after. After all, we also bear witness to Christ. But we are not prophets and apostles. We could put this particular concern most concretely if we were to ask Barth: on which side of the

great divide which distinguishes God from all things human do the prophets and the apostles stand? Do they stand on the divine side, with the Word of God which founds the church? Or do they stand on the human side, over against the Word of God and, therefore, with the church, as merely the first in a historical series of later witnesses which also includes we ourselves? Now this is a very important question to ask, it seems to me, and I do want to address it in the course of my reflections here. However, it seems to me that we will be most faithful to Barth if we understand his answer to this question as a function of his larger preoccupation with the being-in-becoming of Holy Scripture. A rightly-ordered understanding of the relation of the "there and then" of the apostles and prophets to the "here and now" of the interpreter is, for Barth, a function of a rightly-ordered understanding of the event that is the Word of God in all of its dimensions. And this leads quite naturally to my second reason for choosing the focus that I have in this lecture.

My second reason has to do with my conviction that much of American evangelical criticism of Barth's doctrine of Scripture has failed to hit its target because it has taken some of Barth's more striking statements out of their proper context. Any attempt to understand what is meant and what is not meant by Barth's basic claim (viz. that Holy Scripture has its being-in-becoming) places

Dr Bruce L. McCormack is Frederick and Margaret L. Weyerhaeuser Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

upon us the requirement that we attend closely to the material theological framework in which such a claim does its work. When we do that, we discover that the proper context for an adequate comprehension of any of the things Barth says about Scripture, any particular statement, is provided finally by his theological ontology. In other words, the context out of which I will seek to interpret Barth's doctrine of Scripture here will not simply be literary (i.e. what a statement or series of statements might mean when seen in the context of the flow of the particular argument in which they are found). That, too, is important, obviously. But much more important, I will argue, is the context provided by Barth's theological ontology. Where that is missed, we may understand the meaning of a particular statement and completely miss its significance.

In what follows, I am going to begin with an overview of the structure of Barth's doctrine of the Word of God, focused in the notion of the "threefold form of the Word." I will then turn more directly to the "being-in-becoming" of Holy Scripture as the Word of God, seeking to comprehend it within the framework of Barth's theological ontology. Last, I will draw some conclusions from this study for the future of evangelical engagement with Barth.

I. The Threefold Form of the Word of God

Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture was elaborated over a roughly thirteen year period, stretching from 1924 to 1937. From the very beginning, in the lectures given on the prolegomena to dogmatics in Göttingen in the summer semester of 1924, Barth structured his presentation of the doctrine of the Word of God by means of his concept of the "threefold form of the Word": the Word of God is one Word in the three "forms" of Revelation, Holy Scripture, and a preaching which is derived from Holy Scripture.

Barth repeated his prolegomena lectures twice, first in Münster during the winter semester of 1926/27 and then, at much greater length, in the lectures given in Bonn and Basel, which became *Church Dogmatics* I/1 and I/2.² Each time, no matter how much material expansion took place from one version to the next, the concept of a "threefold form of the Word" provided the organizing principle, thus testifying to the high degree of continuity in the material vision which informed both Barth's doctrine of the Word of God and his doctrine of Holy Scripture as one aspect of that more comprehensive doctrine of the Word.

The distinction of revelation from Holy Scripture, as the first two of the "forms" under consideration, may arouse suspicion among evangelicals. So let us pause for a moment. From its first articulation in Göttingen, Barth made it very clear that what he had in view was a *unity-in-differentiation* whose only possible analogue was to be found in the very trinity of God.

I distinguish: the Word of God in a first, original address, in which God Himself, God alone, is the One who speaks; in a second address in which there will be added to the Word a very definite category of human beings, the prophets and apostles; and, in a third address, in which the number of these His human bearers or proclaimers will be theoretically unlimited. But "the Word of God abides forever." It is no other, it becomes no other, in that it is now the first, now the second, now the third; and always, when it is one of the three, it is in some sense also the other two. The Word of God on which dogmatics reflects is...one in *three*, three in *one*: Revelation, Scripture, preaching; Word of God the Revelation, Word of God the Scripture, Word of God preaching, not to be confused and not to be separated. *One* Word of God, *one* authority, *one* truth, *one* power - and yet not one, but *three* addresses. Three addresses of God, in the revelation, in the Scripture, in preaching - and not three Words of God, authorities, truths, powers, but one. Scripture is not the Revelation but is *out of* the Revelation; preaching is neither Revelation nor Scripture but rather *out of* both. But Scripture is the Word of God no less than Revelation [is] and preaching no less than Scripture. The Revelation is out of God alone; the Scripture out of Revelation, preaching out of Revelation and Scripture. But no "prius" or "posterius" [and], therefore, no "maius" or "minus"; the Word of God in the same majesty, the first, the second, the third: "*unitas* in trinitate" and "trinitas in unitate."³

The analogy drawn here is a very tight one indeed; so tight that even the *filioque* doctrine of the Western church is mirrored in Barth's description: Holy Scripture proceeding from revelation but preaching proceeding from *both* revelation and Holy Scripture. The crucial thing to point out at this stage is that Barth really does intend his doctrine of the Word to be understood as one Word with three forms and not three distinct Words that might somehow be hierarchically related to one another. So it is not correct to say that Barth distinguishes "revelation" from Scripture and to leave the matter there. He distinguishes them as "forms," yes; but he distinguishes them only then to insist upon their *unity-in-differentiation*. However true it may be to say of Barth's view that Scripture is not "revelation," the point will be under-

stood correctly only where it is added that both are the Word of God and that a move from the "original" form to the derivative form of Scripture entails no lessening of value.

I should point out, before proceeding, that this lengthy passage, which I just quoted from the Göttingen prolegomena, is repeated almost verbatim in the Münster version of the same.⁴ In the *Church Dogmatics*, the rather effusive prose by means of which Barth has established the analogy between the unity of the three forms of the Word of God and the triunity of God has been suppressed to some extent. But the point remains in force. "We have been speaking of three different forms of the Word of God and not three different Words of God. In this threefold form and not otherwise - but also as the one Word only in this threefold form - the Word of God is given to us and we must try to under-

***The proper context for an adequate
comprehension of any of the things
Barth says about Scripture...
is provided finally by his
theological ontology.***

stand it conceptually. It is one and the same whether we understand it as revelation, Bible, or proclamation. There is no distinction of degree or value between the three forms."⁵ And,

There is only one analogy to this doctrine of the Word of God. Or, more accurately, the doctrine of the Word of God is itself the only analogy to the doctrine which will be one of our fundamental concerns as we develop the concept of revelation. This is the doctrine of the triunity of God. In the fact that we can substitute for revelation, Scripture and proclamation the names of the divine persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit and *vice versa*, that in the one case as in the other we shall encounter the same basic determinations and mutual relationships, that the decisive difficulty and also the decisive clarity is the same in both - in all this one may see specific support for the inner necessity and correctness of our present exposition of the Word of God.⁶

Thus, there was no retreat from the strong emphasis on the unity of the Word of God in its three forms in the *Church Dogmatics*.

But why distinguish "revelation" from Scripture at

all, even if only as different "forms" of the one Word of God? What is at stake for Barth in making this distinction? It would help to clarify the answer to this question if we took a sidelong glance at the understanding of revelation found in the writings of an older contemporary of Barth's, B.B. Warfield. In an essay entitled "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," written just nine years before Barth's Göttingen prolegomena, Warfield distinguished three modes of revelation: external manifestations (or "theophanies"), internal suggestion and concursive operation.⁷ These differing "modes" are found in "three generally successive stages of revelation"; i.e. there is a historical progression to them, starting with the "Patriarchal Age," moving through the "Prophetic Age" and concluding with the "New Testament period."⁸ The meaning of theophany ought to be clear. In describing the mode of the divine revelation to the prophets in terms of "internal suggestion," Warfield had in mind the experience of the prophet in being given an oracle, a divine Word to speak - an experience in which the prophet was so "borne by the Holy Spirit" as to be passive in the reception of the divine Word. The experience of the authors of the New Testament writings seems to differ from this in that, in their case, their "total personality" is made to be the "organ of revelation." The contrast between the experience of the prophet and the apostle seems to be given even greater specificity when Warfield says of the Old Testament prophet that, "To be 'borne' is not the same as to be led, much less to be guided or directed: he that is 'borne' contributes nothing to the movement induced, but is the object to be moved."⁹ The apostle on the other hand, is led, guided, superintended. God works with the apostle "confluently," implying a degree of cooperation, albeit a cooperation in the mode of sheer obedience.¹⁰

Conspicuous by its absence from Warfield's taxonomy of modes of revelation is any attention to Jesus Christ. One might well be forgiven for wondering how it is possible, in the light of passages like John 1:1-2, 14, Hebrews 1:1-2 and 1 John 1:1-3, to omit consideration of the Word made flesh from any consideration of the nature and modes of revelation. And, in fact, Warfield does address the question. He acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the "culminating revelation" towards which all the other modes are finally directed. But as revelation, He differs qualitatively from these other modes. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God. "...He rises above all classification and is *sui generis*..." The revelation that He is "stands outside all the diverse portions and diverse

manners in which otherwise revelation has been given and sums up in itself all that has been or can be made known of God and of His redemption."¹¹ He does not merely disclose God's redemptive purposes but accomplishes them. But the fact that Jesus Christ is revelation in a sense that is not true of other modes of revelation constitutes at most, for Warfield, a reason not to bring it into a conceptual relationship with these other modes. He does not try to bring Jesus Christ as the (admittedly) definitive mode of God's revelation into a positive relationship to the other alleged modes. He contents himself with noting the qualitative difference and, on that basis, decides against granting to Jesus Christ a place in his taxonomy of modes of revelation. He further defends this decision by noting that even though Jesus Christ sums up all revelation in Himself, He is not yet revelation merely by virtue of being what He is. In Himself, He is a mere "fact" like any other whose meaning can only be known through a revealed word of explanation. "...though all revelation is thus summed up in Him, we should not fail to note very carefully that it would also be all sealed up in Him - *so little is revelation conveyed by fact alone, without the word* - had it not been thus taken by the Spirit of truth and declared unto men. The entirety of the New Testament is but the explanatory word accompanying and giving *its effect* to the fact of Christ. And when this fact was in all its meaning made the possession of men, revelation was completed and in that sense ceased. Jesus Christ is no less the end of revelation than He is the end of the Law."¹²

There are several features in this remarkable passage, which help to make Barth's concerns clear by way of the contrast they provide. That Jesus Christ is not *directly and immediately* revelatory in his facticity as a human being, standing on the plane of human history, is something Barth, too, could say (and often did). But what "completes" the circle of revelation differs in each case. For Warfield, what completes the revelation that Jesus Christ is is the accompanying explanatory word. Once that word was written (i.e. once the last of the writings found in the New Testament canon was finished), revelation was "complete." As "complete," it was - from that point on - the secure "possession" of men. The Spirit's work is, apparently, limited to inspiration. Illumination gets short-shrift here. Presupposed is a commitment to a very strong understanding of the perspicuity of Scripture - the clarity of its teaching in and for itself without respect to the problems created by the fallenness of its interpreters. For Barth, by contrast,

what "completes" the circle of revelation is the creation of the human subject who hears and receives the Word of God in faith and obedience - which means that the work of the Spirit in revelation is not complete when once the Scriptures have been written. To use the traditional language, illumination is just as decisive a moment in the process of revelation as inspiration. No full account of the meaning of the statement "the Bible is the Word of God" can be given where the relationship between the "there and then" of what took place in Jesus Christ and the "here and now" of what happens to and in the believer who hears the Word in the church is not set forth in a carefully ordered way. This leads us to an even more fundamental difference of opinion.

Karl Barth could never speak of revelation as in any sense the "possession" of men and women (for reasons we shall consider momentarily). The fact that he could not was not simply a function of his desire (understandable though it was) to locate revelation in a "place" which would make it immune to domestication by humans (with all the horrific consequences, political and otherwise, which such domestication brought in its wake). That was also a motivation but it was not decisive. What was decisive was his careful elaboration of the positive relationship that exists between the definitive mode of revelation and all other putative modes. You see, Barth was convinced that it is from Christology, the definitive mode of God's Self-revelation, that we are to learn what we need to know about the relationship of revelation to the various media through which God has chosen to make Himself known. If it would be wrong to say of the humanity of Jesus Christ that it is, as such, the *direct* revelation of God (and on the soil of Reformed Christology, he had to refuse this possibility), then how can we say this of Scripture? Warfield says it because he believes that the written word is more clear than the Word made flesh. But surely hypostatic union gives rise to a more intimate relationship between the Word of God (the Logos, the second person of the Trinity) and the human element to which it is united than does the uniting of the Word and Scripture which is brought about through the process of "inspiration"? In putting the question this way, Barth's procedure also has the effect of reversing Warfield's priorities. The revelation that Jesus Christ is is brought by Warfield into relation to the taxonomy he has elaborated without its help - with the consequence that Jesus Christ cannot find a place in his taxonomy at all. Barth's procedure is exactly the reverse. He starts with Christology (the problem of the ontologi-

cal constitution of the Mediator) and allows the conclusions drawn there to control what can and should be said subsequently about Holy Scripture as the second "form" of the one Word of God. Everything that he has to say about Holy Scripture is thought out from a center in Christology. With this methodological observation in place, we are now ready to undertake a closer examination of the being-in-becoming of the Bible as the Word of God (i.e. as Holy Scripture).

II. The "Ontology of Holy Scripture" in Barth's Theology

That Holy Scripture has its "being in becoming" does not make it unique in Barth's view. For him, everything that is has its being in becoming. The significance of such a claim for the problem before us can be put initially as follows. It is not as though, confronted by the history of "scientific" investigation of the Bible over the course of the previous century and a half, Barth found it necessary to "retreat" to the view that "the Bible becomes the Word of God" rather than holding fast to the more traditional formulation "the Bible is the Word of God." It is not as though, having gone in search of "errors" in the Bible (however they might be defined), Barth had indeed found some and was now forced to elaborate his view of the Bible becoming the Word of God as an alternative to the older conception. In truth, these were not alternatives for him at all (as we shall see momentarily). There was nothing defensive about the move he was making in the least. Rather, Barth's understanding of the being-in-becoming of Holy Scripture was a function of his commitment to the being-in-becoming of the God-human, his actualizing of the doctrine of the incarnation, which brought in its wake the necessity of affirming the being-in-becoming of the Trinity, of human beings and, ultimately, of everything that is.¹³ It was a function of thinking out of a center in Christology about Trinity, election, theological anthropology, and - yes - Scripture as well. So Barth is not in retreat when he elaborates his conception of Scripture.

Everything that is has its being in becoming. But not everything becomes what it is under the same set of conditions. For Barth the being of God is *Self-determined* being in an absolute sense. The divine aseity means that, in the "primal" decision that is the eternal election of grace, God gives to Himself, appoints for Himself, decides Himself for a being which He will have for all eternity to come.¹⁴ The human, too, is a self-determining subject but is so merely in a relative sense,

not absolutely. The human being is elected by God in eternity to be God's "partner" in the covenant of grace. This eternal divine decision is itself determinative of all the self-determining activities of human individuals. The eternal divine decision encompasses and surrounds human self-determination, limiting it and giving to it its true character. The gift of freedom that God has freely bestowed upon human beings is, thus, a relative freedom only. Human beings can choose to live as covenant-breakers, as those who refuse to act as the covenant-partners God has appointed them to be. Even where this occurs, however, the human cannot really cease to be what he/she is.

Thus, the being of God as a being-in-becoming and the being of the human as a being-in-becoming differ in two fundamental ways. The first is a function of the ontological chasm that separates the being of the Creator from the being of the creature. God alone gives being to *Himself* in eternal election; the human can only *receive* his being from God in the same election. That is the content-specific meaning in the *Church Dogmatics* of a famous phrase from Barth's early years: the "infinite qualitative difference" which distinguishes God and the human.¹⁵ The second way the being of God and the being of the human differ has to do with the presence of sin in human life. The being-in-becoming of God is a being-in-becoming that always remains faithful to the determination God gives to Himself in His gracious election. The being-in-becoming of the human, on the other hand, is one in which the human is constantly threatening to "become" something that he/she "is" not. What the human subject is "essentially" is a relation; or, more concretely, it is the divine act of relating to him/her in election. In that the fallen sinner seeks to use his freedom to "become" something other than what he is "essentially," a dissonance is introduced into his being-in-becoming. "Essence" and act fall apart, something that never takes place in God. God *is* His act, but we cannot say this of the human in the same sense. The human *is* his act only where his actions *conform* to what he is "essentially," as defined by the electing grace of God. As sinful, however, "essence" and act fall apart. Only in the eschaton - and only for those who are finally redeemed - will the being-in-becoming of the creature become a true being-in-act in which "essence" and act stand in perfect conformity, each being the perfect expression of the other. So for this second reason, too, the being-in-becoming of the creature takes place under a different set of conditions than the being-in-becoming

of God.

But the conditions under which Scripture "becomes" what it is differ from those which pertain in both of the cases we have just considered. The Bible is not a person, as God and human beings are persons. The Bible is a thing, an inanimate object. As such, it stands between two radically unequal but nevertheless competing wills; the will of God (which determines its true being as Word of God) and the will of the fallen human interpreter (which seeks to hear in and through the texts of which it is composed everything but the Word of God). Now, these two wills are radically unequal in strength, and this inequality has the following consequences: first, what the Bible is is defined by the will of God as expressed in His act of giving it to the Church. That means that where and when the Bible "becomes" the Word of God, it is only "becoming" what it already is. Second, where and when the Bible does *not* "become" the Word of God, there God has chosen provisionally, for the time being, not to bear witness to Himself in and through its witness to *this particular reader or this particular set of readers of it*. This changes nothing whatsoever as to the true nature of the Bible as defined by the divine will which came to expression in the giving of the Bible to the Church. It only means that God does not will, for the time being, that the Bible should "become" what it is for these readers.

Thus, the being-in-becoming of the Bible as *Holy Scripture*, as the Word of God, is a being-in-becoming which takes place under two conditions. One is the relation of faith and obedience, in which the would-be interpreter stands to the God whose Word the Bible is. And the other, truly decisive condition, is that God is willing to grant faith and obedience to the would-be interpreter so that the first condition might be fulfilled.

I have just spoken of the will of God expressed in the giving of the Bible to the Church. In so doing, I have introduced the subject-matter which was traditionally handled under the heading of "inspiration." Where does Barth stand on "inspiration"? In taking up this question, we are turning more directly to Barth's doctrine of Scripture. As we do so, we will find it necessary to return to Barth's ontology of Scripture in order to avoid mistakes.

"Revelation engenders the Scripture which attests it: as the commission or burden laid on the prophets and apostles, as the object which introduces itself in distinction from them, as both the judge and guarantor of what they say, and as the event of inspiration in which they

become speakers and writers of the Word of God. Because revelation engenders the Bible that attests it, because Jesus Christ has called the Old and New Testaments into existence, because Holy Scripture is the record of a unique hearing of a unique call and a unique obedience to a unique command, therefore, it could become the canon..."¹⁶ What the prophets and the apostles have written, they have written in response to a commission. And so Barth can say that "What we have in the Bible are...human attempts to repeat and reproduce this Word of God in human words and thoughts and in specific situations..."¹⁷ But he does not mean to suggest that what we have in the Bible are *only* human attempts of this kind. For the witness of the prophets and apostles takes place in the fulfilment of an office to which they were not only called but for which they were also empowered.¹⁸

Now Barth is notoriously shy when it comes to speaking of religious experience. So it comes as no surprise that he has little or nothing positive to say about the experience of the human who has been so empowered. He simply notes that it is so and continues on his way. Of greater interest to him is the *effect* of this empowerment. "As the Word of God in the sign of this prophetic-apostolic word of man, Holy Scripture is like the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. It is neither divine only nor human only. Nor is it a mixture of the two, nor a *tertium quid* between them. But in its own way and degree, it is very God and very man, i.e. a witness of revelation which itself belongs to revelation..."¹⁹ To be sure, the "union"²⁰ of the divine and the human in Scripture (of God's Word and human word) does not result in a "divinization" of the human element any more than it does in the case of Christ's humanity. If Christ's humanity is true humanity, then the hypostatic union may not be thought to result in a divinization of the human nature.²¹ So, too, in this case, where something a good deal less intimate than hypostatic union is at work: the relation between the divine element and the human element is a relation which Barth describes by means of the metaphor of an "indirect identity." That is to say, it is an identity in which each term in the relationship remains what it is - the divine remains divine and the human remains human. "...it is quite impossible that there should be a direct identity between the human word of Holy Scripture and the Word of God, and therefore between the creaturely reality in itself and as such and the reality of the Creator. It is impossible that there should have been a transmutation of the one into the

other or an admixture of the one with the other. That is not the case even in the person of Christ..."²² But in the light of this indirect identity, it is perfectly legitimate to say (quite simply) that the Bible is the Word of God.²³ That the Church is able to say anything at all about the event of the incarnation is "only because something unique has taken place between God and these specific men, and because in what they wrote, or what was written by them, they confront us as living documents of that unique event. To try to ignore them is to ignore that unique event. The existence of these specific men is the existence of Jesus Christ for us and for all men [and women]. It is in this function that they are distinguished from us and from all other men [and women], whom they resemble in everything else."²⁴ The prophets and the apostles, we might say with Paul in Ephesians, constitute the foundation on which the Church is built *together with* Christ who is the cornerstone (Eph.2:20). Or, as Barth would have it in the just-cited passage, the Bible *precisely in its humanness* stands on the divine side of the great divide, which distinguishes God from all things human. The Bible and Church proclamation may be similar as human phenomena, but they are dissimilar in that the former has "absolutely constitutive significance" for the latter.²⁵ Consistent with that claim, Barth holds further that the Bible is the Canon, the norm which absolutely and materially judges proclamation in the Church, because "it imposed itself upon the Church as such, and continually does so."²⁶

The will of God, then, as expressed in the giving of the Bible to the Church is that it "be" *Holy Scripture*, the Word of God. And this will was/is realized in and through a union of God's Word with the human words of the prophets and apostles; a union which is not a hypostatic union but stands in a certain analogy to it. We would not falsify Barth's understanding if we were to describe the union in question as a "sacramental union." The word "sacramental" can only be rightly employed here, however, where it is understood that the "participation" which results is not a quasi-perichoretic interpenetration of divine and human "essences" which are statically conceived. "Essences" are, for him, relations with an event-character. But when we keep this qualification in mind, it is perfectly legitimate to speak of a "sacramental union" of the divine Word with the sign that is the prophetic and apostolic witness.²⁷

Now if all of this is true, what then can be the meaning of a statement like, "The Bible ... is not in itself and as such God's past revelation..."²⁸? It is precisely at this

point that a fuller understanding of Barth's theological ontology can offer important assistance. There are two reasons why such a statement must be made. First, Barth wants to say something about the intrinsic limitations of human language. Human language has no capacity in and of itself to be the bearer of the Word of God. Nor does it acquire such a capacity through the inspiration of the prophets and apostles. Inspiration is the experience of the prophets and apostles; it is not something that perdures beyond the immediate experience becoming a permanent attribute of the texts they write. If the word "inspiration" were tied to a fixed state of affairs, something alleged to be true of the Bible *apart from the relation* to God which it acquires through God's

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commitment to the being-in-becoming
of the God-human...***

use of it, then what we would really be saying is that the Bible has the Word of God as its predicate. But the Word of God *is* God and God cannot be made the predicate of anything creaturely. "God is not an attribute of something else, even if this something else is the Bible."²⁹ At this point, it has to be frankly acknowledged that Barth's denial that the Bible has either an intrinsic or a permanently bestowed capacity to be an adequate bearer of the Word of God is, in large measure, simply a function of the Reformed character of his Christology. If there was a constant in Reformed treatments of the person of Christ, it was that the divine and human natures of Christ remain distinct and unimpaired in their original integrity *after* their union in one Person. The writers of the Reformed confessions insisted upon this point in order to render impossible the Lutheran affirmation of a communication of the attributes of the "divine majesty" (divine attributes like omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence) to the human nature of Christ, resulting in a "divinization" of the human nature. If the human nature of Christ is not divinized through the hypostatic union, much less are the human words of the prophets and apostles divinised through the "sacramental union" by which God joins them to the Word of God. So when

evangelical Christians stumble over the claim that human language has no capacity in itself for bearing adequate witness to the Word of God, my suspicion is that they are stumbling, not because they are evangelicals, but because they are not *Reformed* evangelicals. I may be wrong about this, but that is my suspicion.

But, also, the phrase "in itself and as such" in the statement "The Bible is not in itself and as such past revelation" points us in a second direction. Here we are no longer concerned with the ontological chasm that distinguishes the being of God from the being of the creature but with interaction of God and his people in history. To speak of the Bible "in itself and as such" is to speak of the Bible *in abstraction from* the relation that makes it to be what it is "essentially," viz. the Word of God. It is the divine will and act which makes the Bible to be what it is "essentially." Therefore, if a process of abstraction from this relation occurs, who is responsible? The "proximate cause" is obviously the sinfulness of the interpreter (or interpreters). Biblical exegetes abstract what they are interpreting from the relation in which the Bible is what it is and do so with a high degree of consistency. In fact, I would go so far as to say that such a process of abstraction has been made a methodological norm by groups like the SBL and imposed upon its members as a criterion for a hearing within the guild. Hence, it is not all that surprising to find even evangelical biblical scholars making such mental adjustments before undertaking the work of exegesis. Where the acceptance of one's work as "scholarly" is made to rest upon such a process of abstraction, the pressure to conform is tremendous. So, the "proximate cause" of treating the Bible "in itself and as such" lies on the human side.

But the "ultimate cause" must finally be found in the divine will, which determines *in this particular historical situation and in relation to this particular interpreter or set of interpreters* not to override their sinfulness. That God does this at all is an expression of his judgment on sin; a judgment which may, at some later date, be transcended in a gracious Self-speaking in and through the Bible but which, for now, leaves the interpreters confronted by an utterly opaque wall. The Bible *for this person or this set of persons* is not, in that moment, the Word of God. But, again (and this is crucial), such provisional judgments do nothing to set aside or mitigate what the Bible is "essentially." The will of God expressed in the giving of the Bible to the Church is that it be the Word of God. But this was a will which

had reference (in the act of giving) to the totality of those for whom Christ died. It is not yet a will which had in view particular individuals; or it had in view particular individuals only "in Christ" and not as individuals considered as ends in themselves. For particular individuals, God must first make the Bible to be what it is. The Bible must "become" what it is. And this is a "becoming" whose actualization rests solely at the divine discretion. The being-in-becoming of the Bible as Word of God, which *took place* "there and then" under the experience of inspiration, must *take place* "here and now," so that the being-in-becoming of the Bible "here and now" is made to correspond to the originating "being-in-becoming." Therefore, the "sacramental union" of divine Word and human word is a union that *must always be realized* in relation to particular individuals if what is true of the Bible "essentially" is to known as true by them. So when Barth says that "The Bible becomes the Word of God," he is not speaking of what the Bible is so much as he is making a statement about the divine decision with respect to particular interpreters of it in a definite place and time.

The emphasis that falls here on the divine decision is also the answer to evangelical concerns over "subjectivism," and with this we come full circle back to our one of our original concerns. It is not our faith that the Bible is the Word of God that makes it to be so. Only God's decision makes it to be the Word of God; a decision originally expressed in the calling and equipping of the prophets and apostles to be the primary witnesses to God's Self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and reiterated whenever and wherever God speaks through it to the Church and to individuals in the Church.

...the inspiration of the Bible cannot be reduced to our faith in it, even though we understand this faith as a gift and work of God in us. ... We have thought of the divine inspiration of the Bible as an actual decision which takes place in the mystery of God as His work and miracle, and which has to be recollected and expected in faith and obedience and in faithful exegesis. But there is an obvious doubt whether this really does sufficient justice to the objectivity of the truth that the Bible is the Word of God, whether this description is not at least exposed to the danger and may be taken to imply that our faith makes the Bible into the Word of God, that its inspiration is ultimately a matter of our own estimation or mood or feeling. We must not blind ourselves to this danger. But we must ask ourselves how we are to meet it, how we can in fact

do justice to the objectivity of the inspiration of the Bible. Yet obviously we can do justice to it only by refraining from even imagining that we can do so. We do justice to it by believing and resting on the fact that the action of God in the founding and maintaining of His Church, with which we have to do in the inspiration of the Bible, is objective enough to emerge victorious from all the inbreaks and outbreaks of man's subjectivity. To believe in the inspiration of the Bible means, because of and in accordance with its witness, to believe in the God whose witness it is. If we do not, how are we helped by even the strongest assurance of the divinity of its witness? And if we do, how can we ask for any special assurance of it? Is it not to believe without believing, if we want to make such an assurance indispensable?³⁰

Only God is finally adequate to the problem posed by the human tendency towards subjectivism. We will not overcome subjectivism by means of an attempt to demonstrate or prove that the Bible is the Word of God. Even if we were capable of such a thing (and we are not), a "proof" would amount to nothing more than an assurance which we give to ourselves. That would not elimi-

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nate subjectivism. The answer to subjectivism is the objectivity of the God who gave Scripture to the Church and who, subsequently, has continuously given Himself to the Church in and through it.

III. Conclusion

Had the audience for which this paper was written not been evangelical, it would have had to address a quite different set of questions - and issued warnings against misunderstandings and misuse of Barth's doctrine of Scripture on the liberal side. In that liberal theologians and pastors sometimes seek to find in Barth a justification for the thought that human faith grants to the Bible its status as Word of God, we already encounter a misuse. The liturgical formulation "Listen for the Word of God" as an alternative to "This is the Word of the Lord" also constitutes a flattening out of Barth's doctrine. But, I have spelled out the content of Barth's doc-

trine here with specifically evangelical objections in mind.

I do not wish to leave you with the impression that it is my view that if we only understood Karl Barth better, we would find that he was an evangelical. He was not - not in the American sense of that term, at least. I do believe, however, that Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture has more in common with what is usually called the "evangelical doctrine of Scripture" than is often realized. They are compatible doctrines, even if they are not identical. You could summarize the difference by saying simply that where the word "inerrancy" appears in the American evangelical doctrine, the concept of a "dynamic infallibilism" appears in Barth's doctrine.³¹ Both give rise to a very high view of the authority of the Bible.³² This, finally, is my reason for saying that these views are compatible. Still, the "essentialism" embodied in the term "inerrancy" and the actualism embodied in "dynamic infallibilism" are not saying precisely the same thing and cannot, since they presuppose very different philosophical outlooks. To put it this way is to suggest that such differences as remain were a function, finally, of differing *philosophical* commitments - and that necessitates a comment by way of conclusion.

The employment of philosophy within the bounds of theology, Karl Barth often said, is only legitimate where the philosophy in question is made to be a tool for the explication of a theological subject-matter. We subvert the integrity of theological subject-matters where we allow a philosophy to flesh out the central meaning of the concepts to be employed in advance of the doing of theology and then force theology to conform to a content brought to it from without. No doubt, many evangelicals who are not accustomed to thinking in terms of ontologies that are relational and actualistic - as Barth's certainly is - suspect that something like this may have occurred in Barth's own theology. Surely Barth has so wed his theology to some form of Kantian philosophy that his theology has been made the servant of the interests of that philosophy. My own judgment, after years of intensive study of Barth, is that that is *not* the case. The red thread which runs through the whole of Barth's theology - and gives to his theological ontology its character as relational and actualistic - is the strictly theological problem of the meaning of divine immutability in relation to the fact of the incarnation. How is it possible for God to "become" human without undergoing some kind of profoundly ontological change? Put another way, Barth's concern is with the Godness of God in the

mode of His Self-revelation in time. His concern is with the coherence of our confession that the Lord is Jesus.³³

The theological concern registered in Barth's translation is this: If Jesus Christ is the Word which was in the beginning with the Father, if it is *that* Word which was made flesh in Palestine in A.D. 1-30, then the content of revelation must be God Himself, and indeed, God complete, whole and entire. For if God were not fully God in His Self-revelation in Jesus Christ, then what would have been revealed in Jesus Christ would have necessarily been something other than God. Barth will not give any room to a kenosis by subtraction. The "self-emptying" spoken of in Philippians 2 is a kenosis by addition, not by subtraction. In becoming incarnate, God does not leave behind anything that is proper to Him as God. What is laid aside is the "form" of God, "all recognizability of His being" through the addition of the "form" of a servant, i.e. through the assumption of human "nature." Veiled in human flesh, the divine incognito can only be broken where God sovereignly wills that it should be so, for "flesh and blood" alone can never reveal to us who this person is.³⁴ His basic conviction, from very early on, was that the early church's commitment to the Greek philosophical category of "substance" must finally undermine the coherence of its confession of the deity of Jesus Christ.³⁵ It was for this reason that he felt compelled to actualize the doctrine of the incarnation. He turned to post-Kantian philosophies in order to help him explicate what he understood to be a true theological state-of-affairs.

In view of this, it seems to me that the question we evangelicals must ask ourselves is the one Barth asked himself. Did the creation of the ancient trinitarian and christological formulations depend upon an attachment to forms of Greek philosophy that intended only to use philosophy to explicate a theological subject-matter? If yes, then the translation of these ancient philosophical categories into modes of reflection that are more congruent with what philosophers today think is not something we could possibly be opposed to as a matter of principle. We would then be in a position to consider concretely the question of whether the meaning of the gospel was made relatively more clear through the use of ancient philosophies than it was through the use of the modern ones Barth employed or, alternatively, whether the ancient philosophies contributed to a greater darkening of the true meaning of the gospel. And that, it seems to me is the point at which an evangelical engagement with Barth must focus in the future; not on his doctrine

of Scripture or even his alleged universalism but on his exposition of election, Trinity and Christology in actualistic terms. Should this occur, the engagement would truly become serious, for it would have moved from a quibbling with matters that stand on the periphery on

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Barth's concerns to matters which stand, for him, at the very center. And should this occur, I am confident that evangelicals will find in Barth an ally and not a competitor.

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Notes

1 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, p.110 (emphasis mine).

2 The Göttingen lectures were not published during Barth's lifetime. The lectures given at Münster were published in 1927 with the title *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*.

3 Karl Barth, "Unterricht in der christlichen Religion: Erster Band: Prolegomena, 1924," ed. by Hannelotte Reiffen (Zürich: TVZ, 1985), pp.18-19.

4 Karl Barth, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf: I. Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes, Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik, 1927*, ed. by Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: TVZ, 1982), pp.68-9.

5 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, p.120.

6 *Ibid.*, p.121.

7 B.B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation" in *idem.*, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), p.83.

8 *Ibid.*, p.82.

9 *Ibid.*, p.91.

10 *Ibid.*, p.95. Warfield was not entirely happy with the distinction he had just elaborated, noting that 2 Pet.1:21-22 was intended by its author to apply to all the Scriptures (including the New Testament) - which would seem to nullify the distinctions drawn to this point. And that is a shame, for distinctions drawn between the experience of a prophet in receiving an oracle from God and the experience of the apostle writing letters to Christian communities or gathering data for the composition of a Gospel can be made very fruitful for distinguishing literary genres found in the canon of Holy Scripture. And it is very unlikely that Peter had in mind anything other than the prophetic experience in the statement found in 2 Pet.1:21-22. Warfield came very close to providing the grounds for a healthy criticism of the practice common in the history of evangelical reflection on the problem of "inspiration", viz. that of making the experience of the prophet to be paradigmatic for understanding what is happening everywhere under the impress of divine "inspiration". But at the last moment, Warfield drew back from the full implications of his insight.

11 *Ibid.*, p.96.

12 *Ibid.*, p.96 (emphases mine).

13 In CDIV/2, Barth discusses the doctrine of the incarnation for a good hundred pages in terms of the traditional terms *unio hypostatica*, *communicatio idiomatum*, and *communio naturarum*. Throughout, he is at pains to uncover the truth in these traditional terms which must be preserved in any doctrine of the incarnation. But then, suddenly, he takes a step outside the rhetoric he has been using and puts to himself the question: what is it that I have been doing throughout my critical appropriation of the doctrine of Chalcedonian orthodoxy? And the answer he gives is this. "We have 'actualized' the doctrine of the incarnation. ...What has happened is that we have left no place for anything static at the broad cen-

tre of the traditional doctrine of the person of Christ - its development of the concepts of *unio*, *communio* and *communicatio* - or in the traditional doctrine of the two states. We have, in a sense, kept company with the older dogmatics in each of the three concepts, as in those of *exinanitio* and *exaltatio*, to the extent, that is, that they are all terms which speak of actions, operationes, events. But - thinking and speaking in pure concepts of movement - we have re-translated that whole phenomenology into the sphere of a history. And we have done this because originally the theme of it, which here concerns us, is not a phenomenon, or a complex of phenomena, but a history. It is the history of God in his mode of existence as Son, in whom He humbles Himself and becomes also the Son of Man Jesus of Nazareth" (pp.105-6). This emphasis on the "becoming" of the hypostatic union is characteristic of Barth's theology in all of its phases, from the Göttingen Dogmatics right through the end of the Church Dogmatics and counts rightly as the most decisive element of continuity throughout Barth's theological development. It is intended to supplant a conception of the hypostatic union by means of a traditional ontology of being that is controlled by the category of "substance". It was attachment to the category of "substance" which, historically, caused the terms brought into relation in Christology (viz. "God" and the "human") to be defined in static terms rather than in terms appropriate to the lived actuality of their union.

14 On the divine election as the ground of the being-in-becoming of Jesus Christ as both the subject and the object of that election (i.e. as both God and human), see my, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology" in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.92-110; and Eberhard Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden: Verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth, Eine Paraphrase* 4th edition (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1986); E.T. *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976). It is worth noting, before taking our leave of the being-in-becoming of the triune God that such a conception lies very far indeed from process theology. The statement is that God's being is in becoming; not that it "becomes". God's being is not reciprocally related to the world He created such that events that occur in the latter should exercise an influence on His being. God's being

does not undergo change, growth or development of any kind as a consequence of His interactions with the world. To speak of God's being-in-becoming is not intended in any way to suggest this. It is merely, as Jüngel says, to affirm that God's being is "ontologically localized"; it is to understand the being of God in the concreteness of the event in which He gives Himself the being He is and has. See Jüngel, p. vi; E.T. vii.

15 That this distinction does not simply disappear after the "dialectical" phase of Barth's development comes to an end but is given greater specificity and concreteness is demonstrated by the claim made in the context of his doctrine of *concursum* that the basis and constitution of God and the creature as "subjects" are "absolutely unlike" and "cannot even be compared." See Barth, CDIII/3, pp.102-3.

16 Barth, CDI/1, p.115.

17 Ibid., p.113.

18 Barth, CDI/2, p.491.

19 Barth, CDI/2, p.501.

20 Barth, CDI/1, p.113.

21 Barth, CDIV/2, pp.60, 68, 71-2, 77-83, 87-90, 94, 100, 117.

22 Barth, CDI/2, p.499.

23 Barth, CDI/2, p.500.

24 Barth, CDI/2, p.486.

25 Barth, CDI/1, p.102.

26 Barth, CDI/1, p.107.

27 Barth, CDI/2, pp.500-1.

28 Barth, CDI/1, p.111.

29 Barth, CDI/2, p.513.

30 Barth, CDI/2, p.534.

31 The phrase "dynamic infallibilism" is an interpretive

tool of my coining. It is not language that can be found, so far as I can recall, in Barth.

32 Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson have suggested that there is a "tension" between "Barth's theory of Scripture and his use of it." They note that "Barth treats Scripture as if it were an absolute authority in theology" (emphasis mine). But they seem to think that Barth's theory should not have allowed him to treat Scripture in this way. See Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p.76. Against this, we need only point to the fact that Barth does not merely treat Scripture "as if it were an absolute authority in theology"; his theory itself affirms that it is so. Holy Scripture alone, he says, as the Word of God, has "direct and absolute and material authority." See Barth, CDI/2, p.538. I hope that my exposition of Barth's "theory" of Scripture in this paper has been sufficient to show that there is no tension between that "theory" and his use of the Bible in his theology. The "theory" is everywhere born out by the practice.

33 Karl Barth, *Erklärung des Philipperbriefes* (Zürich-Zollikon: EVZ, 1947), p.66. It should be noted that Barth's translation is exegetically justified by the syntax found in v.11. On this point, cf. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), p.222-24. In spite of his acknowledgement that the confession of all creation on the day of judgment takes the form, syntactically, of "The Lord is Jesus Christ", Fee nevertheless decides the translation in favor of the more traditional "that Jesus Christ is Lord." I think myself that what is finally determinative of the decisions of translators is not exegetical considerations alone but what they are able to make or not make dogmatically of the thought that "the Lord is Jesus Christ." If translators are unable to make any sense of the thought that "the Lord is Jesus Christ," then they opt to reverse the order.

34 Ibid., pp.60-2.

35 See above, note #13.

Truth with a Mission: Reading Scripture Missiologically

by the Rev. Dr. Chris Wright

I remember them so vividly from my childhood: the great banner texts around the walls of the missionary conventions in Northern Ireland, where I would help my father at the stall of the Unevangelized Fields Mission, of which he was Irish Secretary after twenty years in Brazil. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," they urged me, along with other similar imperatives in glowing gothic calligraphy. By the age of 12, I could have quoted all the key ones: "Go ye therefore and make disciples...", "How shall they hear...?", "You shall be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth." "Whom shall we send?...Here am I, send me." I knew my missionary Bible verses, and I had responded to many a rousing sermon on most of them.

By the age of 21 I had finished my pursuit of a degree in theology from Cambridge, throughout which the same texts had been curiously lacking. At least, it is curious to me now. At the time there seemed to be little connection at all between theology and mission in the mind of the lecturers, or of myself, or, for all I knew, in the mind of God either. "Theology" was all about God – what he was like, what he'd said and what he'd done and what mostly dead people had speculated on all three. "Mission" was about us the living and what we've been doing since William Carey (who of course was the first missionary, we so erroneously thought), or more precisely, mission is what we evangelicals do since we're the ones who know that the Bible has told us (or some of us at least) to go and be missionaries.

"Mission is what we do." That was the assumption, supported of course by clear biblical commands. "Jesus sends me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Many years later, including years when I was teaching theology myself as a missionary in India (another curious thought: I could have done precisely the same job in a college in England, but that would not have been considered "mission"), I found myself teaching a class

called *The Biblical Basis of Mission* at All Nations Christian College, an international mission training institution. The class title itself embodies the same assumption. Mission is the noun, the given reality. It is something we do and we basically know what it is. And the reason why we know we should be doing it, the basis, foundation or grounds on which we justify it, must be found in the Bible. As good evangelicals we need a biblical basis for everything we do. What, then, is the biblical basis for mission? Roll out the texts. Add some that nobody else has thought of. Do some joined up theology. Add some motivational fervor. And the class is heartwarmingly appreciative. Now they have even more biblical support for what they already believed anyway, for these are All Nations students after all. They only came because they are committed to doing mission.

This mild caricature is not in the least derogatory in intent. I believe passionately that mission is what we should be doing, and I believe the Bible endorses and mandates it. However, the more I taught that course, the more I used to introduce it by telling the students that I would like to rename it: from *The Biblical Basis of Mission*, to *The Missional Basis of the Bible*. I wanted them to see, not just that the Bible contains a number of texts which happen to provide a rationale for missionary endeavor, but that *the whole Bible is itself a "missional" phenomenon*. The writings which now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of, and witness to, the ultimate mission of God. The Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole

Chris Wright, PhD., is the International Ministries Director of the Langham Partnership International, a group of ministries committed to leadership development in the churches of the Majority World.

of God's creation. The Bible is the drama of a God of purpose engaged in the mission of achieving that purpose universally, embracing past, present and future, Israel and the nations, "life, the universe and everything." Mission is not just one of a list of things that the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that much-abused phrase, "what it's all about."

Now this is a bold claim. I would not expect to be able to turn any phrase that began "The Biblical Basis of..." around the other way. There is, for example, a biblical basis for marriage, but there is not, I presume, "a marital basis for the Bible." There is a biblical basis for work, but work is not "what the Bible is all about." However, I take some encouragement for my claim from an impeccable authority: it seems to me that Jesus comes very close to saying "This is what the Bible is all about" when he gave his disciples their final lecture in Old Testament hermeneutics.

He told them, "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

Now Jesus is not quoting a specific text here, though we would love to have been able to ask which scriptures he particularly had in mind (doubtless the two from Emmaus could have filled in the gaps). The point is that he includes the whole of this sentence under the heading: "this is what is written." He seems to be saying that the whole of the Scripture (which we now know as the Old Testament), finds its focus and fulfillment *both* in the life and death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah *and* in the mission to all nations, which flows out from that event. Luke tells us that with these words Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures," or, as we might put it, he was setting their hermeneutical orientation and agenda. The proper way for disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, to read their Scriptures, is *messianically* and *missionologically*. Paul, though he was not present for the Old Testament hermeneutics lecture on the day of resurrection, clearly had his own way of reading his Scriptures radically transformed in exactly the same way with the same double focus. Testifying before Festus he declares, "I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Messiah would suffer and,

as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light *to his own people and to the nations*" (Acts 26:22-23). It was this dual understanding of the Scriptures which had then shaped Paul's whole resume as the apostle of the Messiah Jesus to the Gentiles.

On the whole, evangelicals have been good at the former (messianic reading of the Old Testament), but inadequate with the latter (missionological reading of it). We read the Old Testament messianically in the light of Jesus, in the sense of finding in it a whole messianic theology and eschatology which we see as fulfilled in Jesus. In doing so we follow his own example, of course, and that of his first followers and the authors of the Gospels. But what we have so often failed to do is to go beyond the mere satisfaction of checking off so-called messianic predictions that have "been fulfilled." We have failed to go further because we have not grasped the missionological significance of the Messiah.

The Messiah was the promised one who would embody in his own person the identity and mission of Israel, as their representative, king, leader and savior. Through the Messiah as his anointed agent, Yahweh the God of Israel would bring about all that he intended for Israel. But what was that mission of Israel? Nothing less than to be "a light to the nations," the means of bringing the redemptive blessing of God to all the nations of the world, as originally promised in the title deeds of the covenant with Abraham. For the God of Israel is also the creator God of all the world. Through the Messiah, therefore, the God of Israel would also bring about all that he intended for the nations. The eschatological redemption and restoration of Israel would issue in the ingathering of the nations. The full meaning of recognizing Jesus as Messiah, then, lies in recognizing also his role in relation to the mission of Israel for the sake of the nations. Hence, a messianic reading of the Old Testament has to flow on to a missionological reading – which is precisely the connection that Jesus makes in Luke 24.

However, even if we accept that Jesus offers us a messiah-focused and mission-generating hermeneutic of the Scriptures, we may still query the claim that somehow there is a missional hermeneutic of the whole Bible such that "mission is what it's all about." This uneasiness stems from the persistent, almost subconscious paradigm that mission is fundamentally "something we do." This is especially so if we fall into the evangelical reductionist habit of using the word "mission" or "missions" as more or less synonymous with evangelism. Quite

clearly the whole Bible is not just “about evangelism,” even though evangelism is certainly a fundamental part of biblical mission as entrusted to us. Evangelism is something we do and it is validated by clear biblical imperatives. The appropriateness of speaking of “a mis-

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sional basis of the Bible” becomes apparent only when we shift our paradigm of mission from our human agency to the ultimate purposes of God himself. For clearly the Bible is, in some sense, “all about God.” What, then, does it mean to talk of the mission of God?

God with a mission

Though the phrase *Missio Dei* has been misused in some theology virtually to exclude evangelism, it does express a major biblical truth. The God revealed in the Scriptures is personal, purposeful and goal orientated. The opening account of creation portrays God working towards a goal, completing it with satisfaction and resting, content with the result. And from the great promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 we know this God to be totally, covenantally, eternally committed to the mission of blessing the nations through the agency of the people of Abraham. From that point on, the mission of God could be summed up in the words of the hymn, “God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year,” and as generations come and go.

The Bible presents itself to us fundamentally as a narrative, a historical narrative at one level, but a grand, meta-narrative at another. It begins with a God of purpose in creation; moves on to the conflict and problem generated by human rebellion against that purpose; spends most of its narrative journey in the story of God’s redemptive purposes being worked out on the stage of human history; and finishes beyond the horizon of its own history with the eschatological hope of a new creation. This has often been presented as a four-point narrative: creation, fall, redemption and future hope. This whole world-view is predicated on teleological

monotheism: that is, there is one God at work in the universe and in human history, and that God has a goal, a purpose, a mission which will ultimately be accomplished by the power of his word and for the glory of his name. This is the mission of the biblical God.

To read the whole Bible in the light of this great over-arching perspective of the mission of God is to read “with the grain” of this whole collection of scriptures that constitute our canon. This foundational point is a key assumption of “a missiological hermeneutic” of the Bible. It is nothing more than to accept that the biblical worldview locates us in the midst of a narrative of the universe behind which stands the mission of the living God. All creation will render “glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.” That is a missional perspective.

Humanity with a mission

On the day of their creation, human beings were given their mission on the planet that was purposefully prepared for their arrival: the mandate to fill the earth and subdue it and to rule over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:28). This delegated authority within the created order is moderated by the parallel commands in the complementary account, “to serve and to keep” the Garden (Gen. 2:15). The care and keeping of creation is our human mission. We are on the planet with a purpose that flows from the creative purpose of God himself. Out of this understanding of our humanity (which is also teleological, like our doctrine of God) flows our ecological responsibility, our economic activity involving work, productivity, exchange and trade, and the whole cultural mandate. To be human is to have a purposeful role in God’s creation. In relation to that creational mission, Christians need to be reminded that God holds us accountable to himself for our humanity as much as for our Christianity. There is, therefore, a legitimate place for ecological concern and action, for biblical earth-keeping, within our understanding of Christian mission responsibility – on the assumption that Christians too are humans made in the image of God (indeed being restored even more fully to that humanity in Christ), who have not been given some privileged exemption from the mission God entrusted to our whole species. This ecological dimension of our mission flows not only from creation, but also reflects an eschatological perspective: the biblical vision is of a new creation, of which Christ is the heir. Our care for the earth is an expression of our

understanding of its future as well as its origin (similarly to our concern for the human person).

Israel with a mission

Against the background of human sin and rebellion, described in the bleak narratives of Genesis 3-11 running from the disobedience of Adam and Eve to the building of the tower of Babel, God initiates his redemptive mission of blessing the nations of humanity, beginning with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. This is the essential missional purpose of God's election of Israel. Israel came into existence as a people with a mission entrusted from God for the sake of the rest of the nations. All that Israel was, or was supposed to be — all that Yahweh their God did in them, for them and through them — was ultimately linked to this wider purpose of God for the nations.

A missiological hermeneutic of the Old Testament, in its redemptive dimension, centers around this point. Israel's election was not a rejection of other nations but was explicitly for the sake of all nations. This universality of God's purpose that embraces the particularity of God's chosen means is a recurrent theme. Though not always explicitly present, it is never far from the surface of the way in which Scripture portrays Israel's intended self-understanding. We shall explore this missiological reading of the Old Testament more fully below.

Jesus with a mission

Jesus did not just arrive. He had a very clear conviction that he was sent. But even before Jesus was old enough to have clear convictions about anything, his significance was recognized. Just as Luke ends his gospel with the double significance of Jesus for Israel and for the world, so also right at the start he makes the same connection. It is there in the words of recognition spoken by Simeon as he cradled the infant Jesus, words appreciated by generations of Anglicans for their evening beauty in the *Nunc dimittis*, but rarely recognized for the missiological significance of their double messianic claim: "Lord now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of *all people*, to be a light for revelation to *the nations* and for glory to your people *Israel*" (Lk. 2:29-32).

It was at his baptism that Jesus received an affirmation of his true identity and mission. The voice of his Father at his baptism combined the identity of the Servant figure in Isaiah (echoing the phraseology of

Isaiah 42:1), and that of the Davidic messianic king (echoing the affirmation of Psalm 2:7). Both of these dimensions of his identity and role were energized with a sense of mission. The mission of the Servant was both to restore Israel to Yahweh and also to be the agent of God's salvation reaching to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6). The mission of the Davidic messianic king was both to rule over a redeemed Israel according to the agenda of many prophetic texts, and also to receive the nations and the ends of the earth as his heritage (Ps. 2:8).

Jesus' sense of mission — the aims, motivation and self-understanding behind his recorded words and actions — has been a matter of intense scholarly discussion. What seems very clear is that Jesus built his own agenda on what he perceived to be the agenda of his Father. His will was to do his Father's will. God's mission determined his. In the obedience of Jesus, even to death, the mission of God reached its climax.

The church with a mission

As our quotation of Luke 24 above indicated, Jesus entrusted to the church a mission which is directly rooted in his own identity, passion and victory as the crucified and risen Messiah. Jesus immediately followed the text quoted with the words, "You are witnesses" — a mandate repeated in Acts 1:8, "You will be my witnesses." It is almost certain that Luke intends us to hear in this an echo of the same words spoken by Yahweh to Israel in Isaiah 43:0-12:

You are my witnesses, declares the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen,

So that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Before me no god was formed nor will there be one after me.

I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior.

I have revealed and saved and proclaimed — I, and not some foreign god among you.

You are my witnesses, declares the LORD, that I am God.

Israel knew the identity of the true and living God; therefore they were entrusted with bearing witness to that in a world of nations and their gods. The disciples know the true identity of the crucified and risen Jesus; therefore they are entrusted with bearing witness to that to the ends of the earth. Mission flows from the identity

of God and his Christ.

Paul goes further and identifies the mission of his own small band of church planters with the international mission of the Servant, quoting Isaiah 49:6 in Acts 13:47 and saying quite bluntly, “this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the nations, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (a missiological hermeneutic of the Old Testament if ever there was one. As the NIV footnote shows, Paul has no problem applying the singular “you” – which was spoken to the Servant, to the plural “us”). So again, the mission of the church flows from the mission of God and the fulfillment of his purposes and his word. It is not so much, as someone has said, that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission is not just something we do (though it certainly includes that). Mission, from the point of view of our human endeavor, means the committed participation of God’s people in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation. Mission, like salvation, belongs to our God and to the Lamb. We

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are those who are called to share in its accomplishment. Putting these perspectives together, then, and summarizing what has been said thus far, a missiological hermeneutic means that we seek to read any part of the Bible:

- In the light of God’s purpose for his whole creation, including the redemption of humanity and the creation of the new heavens and new earth;
- In the light of God’s purpose for human life in general on the planet, and of all the Bible teaches about human culture, relationships, ethics and behavior;
- In the light of God’s historical election of Israel, their identity and role in relation to the nations, and the demands he made on their worship, social ethics and total value system;
- In the light of the centrality of Jesus of Nazareth, his

messianic identity and mission in relation to Israel and the nations, his cross and resurrection;

- In the light of God’s calling of the church, the community of believing Jews and Gentiles who constitute the extended people of the Abraham covenant, to be the agent of God’s blessing to the nations in the name of, and for the glory of, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Missiological Perspective on the Old Testament

Evangelical Christians have traditionally had less of a problem reading the New Testament from a missional angle, which is hardly surprising given the dominance within the New Testament of the Apostle Paul and his missionary travels and writings. So in the rest of this essay I want to focus on how the above proposals can help us to develop a missiological reading of the Old Testament.

Certainly, *preaching* mission from the Old Testament usually rouses people’s curiosity, mainly because it is unexpected. Many people, in my frequent experience, are surprised to hear a sermon on mission based on a text from the Old Testament. “Mission” is widely viewed as a task originating from some words of Jesus on the Mount of Ascension. It seems to involve sending off peculiar but doubtless very worthy people to far-off parts of the earth to work for God in a bewildering variety of ways, and then to return from time to time to tell us about their adventures and ask for continued support. Since nothing of that sort seems to have happened in the Old Testament (not even Jonah came home on furlough to raise funds for a return trip to Nineveh), mission is deemed “missing – presumed unborn” in that era.

A more sophisticated form of such a caricature is to be found in the way David Bosch relegates the Old Testament’s contribution on mission to a sub-section of a chapter entitled “Reflections on the New Testament as a Missionary Document,” in his magisterial survey, *Transforming Mission*.¹ The Old Testament certainly provides essential theological preparation for the emerging mission of the New Testament church, but Bosch defines mission in terms of crossing barriers for the sake of the Gospel (barriers of geography, culture, language, religion, etc.). Since Israel received no mandate to *go to* the nations in that sense, there is, in Bosch’s view, no mission in the Old Testament.

Apart from observing that in fact there are many “barrier-crossing” episodes in the grand Old Testament

story of Israel's journey with Yahweh which are worthy of missiological reflection, I would argue that Bosch has defined mission too narrowly. What follows is a brief survey of some of the key Old Testament themes, which contribute to the broadening of the idea of mission which I have argued for above. This is, to be clear once again, not a search for bits of the Old Testament that might say something relevant to our narrowed concept of sending missionaries, but rather a sketch of some of the great trajectories of Israel's understanding of their God and his mission through them and for the world. We are not concerned about how the Old Testament gives incidental support to what we already do, but with the theology that under girds the whole worldview that Christian mission assumes.

What we will merely sketch below are the missiological implications of four major pillars of Old Testament faith: monotheism, election, ethics and eschatology. A great deal more could be fruitfully explored in the same way.

The uniqueness and universality of Yahweh.

According to the Old Testament texts, the faith of Israel made remarkable affirmations about Yahweh, affirmations which had a polemical edge in their own context and still stand as distinctive claims. Among them are the declaration that Yahweh alone is God and there is no other (e.g. Deut. 4:35, 39). As sole deity, it is Yahweh, therefore, who owns the world and runs the world (Deut. 10:14, 27, Ps. 24:1, Jer. 27:1-12, 1 Chron. 29:11). This ultimately means the radical displacement of all other rival gods and that Yahweh is God over the whole earth and all nations (e.g. Ps. 96, Jer. 10:1-16, Isa. 43:9-13, 44:6-20). The impact of these claims is felt in such widely varying contexts as the struggle against idolatry, the language of worship, and the response to other nations, both in their own contemporary international history, and in eschatological vision.

There is no doubt that the strength of the Old Testament affirmations about the uniqueness and universality of Yahweh as God underlie, and indeed provide some of the vocabulary for, the New Testament affirmations about the uniqueness and universality of Jesus (cf. Phil. 2:9-11, based on Isa. 45:23, and 1 Cor. 8:5-6, based on Deut. 6:4). It is also note-worthy that these early Christian affirmations were equally polemical in their own historical context as those of ancient Israel and in turn provided the primary rationale and motivation for

Christian mission. We are dealing here with the missiological implications of biblical monotheism.

A fully biblical understanding of the universality and uniqueness of Yahweh and of Jesus Christ stands in the frontline of a missiological response to the relativism at the heart of religious pluralism and some forms of postmodernist philosophy.

Yahweh's election of Israel for the purpose of blessing the nations.

The Old Testament begins on the stage of universal history. After the accounts of creation we read the story of God's dealings with fallen humanity and the problem and challenge of the world of the nations (Gen. 1-11). After the stories of the Flood and of the Tower of Babel, could there be any future for the nations in relation to God? Or would judgement have to be God's final word?

The story of Abraham, beginning in Genesis 12, gives a clear answer. God's declared commitment is that he intends to bring blessing to the nations: "all the families of the earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). Repeated six times in Genesis alone, this key

Mission...means the committed participation of God's people in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation.

affirmation is the foundation of biblical mission, inasmuch as it presents the *mission of God*. The creator God has a purpose, a goal, and it is nothing less than blessing the nations of humanity. So fundamental is this divine agenda that Paul defines the Genesis declaration as "the gospel in advance" (Gal. 3:8). And the concluding vision of the whole Bible signifies the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, as people from every nation, tribe, language and people are gathered among the redeemed in the new creation (Rev. 7:9). The gospel and mission both begin in Genesis, then, and both are located in the redemptive intention of the Creator to bless the nations. Mission is God's address to the problem of fractured humanity. And God's mission is universal in its ultimate goal and scope.

The same Genesis texts which affirm the *universality* of God's mission to bless the nations also, and with equal strength, affirm the *particularity* of God's election

of Abraham and his descendants to be the vehicle of that mission. The election of Israel is assuredly one of the most fundamental pillars of the biblical worldview, and of Israel's historical sense of identity.² It is vital to insist that although the belief in their election could be (and was) distorted into a narrow doctrine of national superiority, that move was resisted in Israel's own literature (e.g. Deut. 7:7ff.). The affirmation is that Yahweh, the God who had chosen Israel, was also the creator, owner and Lord of the whole world (Deut. 10:14f., cf. Ex. 19:4-6). That is, he was not just "their God" – he was God of all (as Paul hammers home in Romans 4). Yahweh had chosen Israel in relation to his purpose for the world, not just for Israel. The election of Israel was not tantamount to a rejection of the nations, but explicitly for their ultimate benefit. If we might paraphrase John, in a way he would probably have accepted, "God so loved the *world* that he chose *Israel*."

Thus, rather than asking if Israel itself "had a mission," in the sense of being "sent" anywhere (anachronistically injecting our "sending missionaries" paradigm again), we need to see the missional nature of Israel's *existence* in relation to the mission of God in the world. Israel's mission was to *be* something, not to *go* somewhere. This perspective is clearly focused in the person of the Servant of Yahweh, who both embodies the election of Israel (identical things are said about Israel and the Servant), and also is charged with the mission (like Israel's) of bringing the blessing of Yahweh's justice, salvation and glory to the ends of the earth.

The ethical dimension of Israel's "visibility" among the nations.

Naturally, then, there is an enormous amount of interest in the Old Testament around the way in which Israel related to the nations. It is far from being a simple relationship. On the one hand there is the ultimate vision of Israel being a blessing to the nations. On the other hand there is the calling for Israel to be separate from them, to resist their idolatry, to avoid their wickedness, to reject their gods and their ways. At the same time, Israel was a nation among other nations in the broad sweep of Ancient Near Eastern macro-culture, and so there is considerable missiological interest in the variety of ways in which the faith of Israel related positively and negatively to the cultures of other nations over the centuries. We could give much more missiological attention to the different responses of, for example, the patriarchal narratives to their surrounding culture; of the

Deuteronomic materials to Canaanite culture; of the prophets to the relationship between Israel's experiment with royalty (king and temple) and Canaanite parallels;

The question of Israel's ethical obedience or ethical failure was not...merely a matter between themselves and Yahweh, but was of major significance in relation to Yahweh's agenda for the nations.

of the exilic and post-exilic communities to the world of Mesopotamian and Persian religion and culture; and these are just some of the possibilities.³

But the major point of interest here is, in its shortest expression, the missiological dimension of Israel's holiness. Israel was called to be distinctive from the surrounding world in ways that were not merely religious but also ethical. This is expressed as the very purpose of their election in relation to God's promise to bless the nations in Genesis 18:19. In the context of, and in stark contrast to, the world of Sodom and Gomorrah, Yahweh says of Abraham:

I have chosen him *so that* he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, *so that* the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

This verse, in a remarkably tight syntax, binds together election, ethics and mission as three interlocking aspects of God's purpose. His choice of Abraham is for the sake of his promise (to bless the nations); but the accomplishment of that demands the ethical obedience of his community – the fulcrum in the middle of the verse.

Later, covenantal obedience is not only based on Israel's historical redemption out of Egypt, but also linked to their identity and role as a priestly and holy people in the midst of the nations in Exodus 19:4-6. As Yahweh's priesthood, Israel would be the means by which God would be known to the nations and the means of bringing them to God (performing a function analogous to the role of Israel's own priests between God and the rest of the people). As a holy people, they would be

ethically (as well as ritually) distinctive from the practices of surrounding nations. The moral and practical dimensions of such holy distinctiveness are spelled out in Leviticus 18-19. Such visibility would be a matter of observation and comment among the nations, and that expectation in itself was a strong motivation for keeping the law (Deut. 4:6-8). The question of Israel's ethical obedience or ethical failure was not, then, merely a matter between themselves and Yahweh, but was of major significance in relation to Yahweh's agenda for the nations (cf. Jer. 4:1-2).

This missiological perspective on Old Testament ethics seems to me a fruitful approach to the age-old hermeneutical debate over whether and how the moral teaching given to Israel in the Old Testament (especially the law), has any authority or relevance to Christians. If, as I believe, it was given in order to shape Israel to be what they were called to be – a light to the nations, a holy priesthood – then it has a paradigmatic relevance to those who, in Christ, have inherited the same role in relation to the nations. In the Old as well as the New Testament, the ethical demand on those who claim to be God's people is determined by the mission with which they have been entrusted.

Eschatological vision; ingathering of nations.

Israel saw the nations (including themselves) as being subject to the sovereign rule of God in history – whether in judgment or in mercy. This is a dimension of the Old Testament faith that we need to get our minds around, since it does not sit very congenially with our tendency to a very individualistic and pietistic form of spirituality (cf. Jer. 18:1-10, Jonah).

But Israel also thought of the nations as “spectators” of all God's dealings with Israel – whether positively or negatively. That is, whether on the receiving end of God's deliverance or of the blows of his judgment, Israel lived on an open stage and the nations would draw their conclusions (Ex. 15:15, Deut. 9:28, Ezek. 36:16-23).

Eventually, however, and in a rather mysterious way, the nations could be portrayed as the beneficiaries of all that God had done in and for Israel, and even invited to rejoice, applaud and praise Yahweh the God of Israel (Ps. 47, 1 Kgs. 8:41-43, Ps. 67). And, most remarkable of all, Israel came to entertain the eschatological vision that there would be those of the nations who would not merely be joined to Israel, but would come to be identified as Israel, with the same names, privileges and responsibilities before God. (Ps. 47:9, Isa. 19:19-25, 56:2-8, 66:19-

21, Zech. 2:10-11, Amos 9:11-12, Acts 15:16-18, Eph. 2:11 – 3:6).

These texts are quite breathtaking in their universal scope. This is the dimension of Israel's prophetic heritage that most profoundly influenced the theological explanation and motivation of the gentile mission in the New Testament. It certainly underlies James' interpretation of the Christ event and the success of the gentile mission in Acts 15 (quoting Amos 9:12). And it likewise inspired Paul's efforts as a practitioner and theologian of mission (e.g. Rom. 15:7-16). And, as we saw earlier, it provided the theological shape for the Gospels, all of which conclude with their various forms of the great commission – the sending of Jesus' disciples into the world of nations.

Finally, of course, we cannot omit the even wider vision that not only the nations, but the whole creation will be included in God's purposes of redemption. For this God of Israel, of the nations, and of the world, declares himself to be creating a new heavens and a new earth, with a picture of a redeemed humanity living in safety, harmony and environmental peace within a renewed creation. Again, this is a portrait enthusiastically endorsed in the New Testament and sustains our hope today (Ps. 96:11-13, Isa. 65:17-25, Rom. 8:18-21, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:1-5).

Conclusion

Much more could be said, taking up other major themes of the Old Testament and reading them from the perspective of the missional purpose of God for his people and his world. From this angle also individual stories, event, persons, institutions come to have an added significance. At least I trust this sketch may have touched on some of what Jesus had in mind when he asserted that the mission of bringing the good news of repentance and forgiveness in his name the nations is nothing less than what is written in the Scriptures that pointed to himself.



Notes

1 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991). The relevant words are: "There is, in the Old Testament, no indication of the believers of the old covenant being sent by God to cross geographical, religious, and social frontiers in order to win others to faith in Yahweh....Even so, the Old Testament is fundamental to the understanding of mission in the New" (p. 17).

2 This has been shown very clearly, and in a way which underlines its importance for the whole mission of the biblical God through the people of God for the world, in the works of N.T. Wright, especially his *New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) pp. 244-79, and *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996).

3 Walter Brueggemann is one of very few Old Testament scholars who have given serious and detailed attention to the nations as a theological reality in the Old Testament. See *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Fortress, 1997), ch. 16, pp. 492-527.

Believing the Truth: The Authority of Scripture

by the Rev. Dr. John Stott

One of the characteristics of our day is the loss of authority in the world. Moreover, this anti-authority mood has seeped into the Church. Hence the widespread theological confusion; its main cause is the lack of an agreed authority.

In theory all Christians agree that Jesus Christ is Lord. For all authority belongs to him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). But if Jesus is Lord, how does he exercise his authority in the Church? The Evangelical reply is that Christ rules his church through his Word. For he himself affirmed his authority. That is why the authority of Christ and the authority of Scripture stand or fall together.

Since, however, he lived between the Testaments (the Old Testament being complete, while the New Testament had not yet begun to be written), the way in which he confirmed each was different.

The authority of the Old Testament (and Christ's endorsement of it)

It is very striking that Jesus consistently submitted himself to the authority of the Old Testament. There are three main examples.

His moral conduct

No example is more impressive than his encounter with the Devil in the Judean desert. Jesus responded to each temptation with an apt quotation from Deuteronomy 6 or 8, chapters on which he had evidently been meditating during the forty days of his fast. Form him the simple Greek word *ge.graptai* ("it stands written") was sufficient. There was no need to discuss or to argue; the matter was already settled because of what stood written in Scripture.

His official mission

The Gospels do not reveal the process by which Jesus came to know who he was (his identity) or what he had come into the world to do (his mission). But it seems

likely that he learned these things through meditating on Scripture. He became aware that he was both Daniel's "Son of Man", who would come in the clouds and whom the nations would serve, and Isaiah's servant of God, who would suffer and die. Indeed, he put the two together, adding that he would enter into his glory only through suffering. 'The Son of Man must suffer many things', he said, and the reason for his sense of compulsion was that this was written of him in Scripture. So in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter tried to prevent Jesus' arrest he said, "Put up your sword. Do you not think I could appeal to my Father? He would immediately give me legions of angels, but how then should the Scripture be fulfilled that this must be so?" (Matthew 26:52-54).

His public controversies

Jesus Christ was a controversialist. He was in constant debate with the religious leaders of his day. And in every conflict with them he made Scripture the final court of appeal. "Have you read?," he would ask them incredulously, or "What is written in the Law, how do you read?" In particular, he was critical of the Pharisees for adding to Scripture (their traditions), and of the Sadducees for subtracting from Scripture (the miraculous).

Putting these three together (his moral conduct, his official mission and his public controversies), it is beyond question that our Lord Jesus Christ was personally submissive to the Old Testament as the Word of his Father. The decisive question for him was what Scripture said. It is inconceivable that we should have a lower view of the Old Testament than he had.

The Rev. Dr. John Stott is Rector Emeritus of All Souls Anglican Church, London England.

The authority of the New Testament (Christ's provision for it)

The argument now is that Jesus not only foresaw the writing of the New Testament Scriptures, parallel to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but that he intended it (to record and interpret what God was doing), and made provision for it by appointing and equipping his apostles.

Jesus gave his apostles a unique authority to be his representatives and to teach in his name. The word "apostle" is used once in the New Testament of every Christian, namely "he who is sent (literally, "the apostle") is not greater than he who sent him" (John 13:16), for every Christian shares in the apostolic mission of the Church to preach the gospel to all people. Then there are two or three verses which refer to the apostles of the churches, in distinction from the apostles of Christ; we would call them missionaries (e.g. 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil 2:25). But the overwhelming use of the word in the New Testament is of the Twelve and of Paul, and maybe one or two others, but a very small and special group. It is important to consider their threefold uniqueness.

Their personal appointment and authorization by Jesus

Jesus himself chose the Twelve, gave them the authority, and named them "apostles" (Luke 6:12, 13). Later he laid hold of Saul, giving him this same apostolic designation (Acts 26:17), so that in nine out of his thirteen letters Paul begins with a statement, "Paul, *an apostle of Jesus Christ*, by the will of God", or "by the command of God." Here is a very clear claim that he had been appointed and authorized by Jesus to be an apostle.

Their eyewitness experience of the historic Jesus

Jesus appointed the Twelve both "to be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14; cf. John 15:26,27). They had to be with him before they could testify to him. So he gave them unrivalled opportunities to hear his words and see his works, in order that they might bear witness to him out of their eyewitness experience. Then, when it was necessary to appoint an apostle in the place of Judas, Peter said that they must choose one "who had accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ...that he might be with us an eyewitness to the resurrection" (Acts 1:21f.). That is why Paul could claim to be an apostle. He was not one of the Twelve, but he was granted a resurrection appearance. To be sure it was unusual because it happened after the Ascension; nevertheless he claims that it was a true, objective appearance

of the risen Lord. So he writes: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8,9). An eyewitness experience of the historic Jesus, or at least of the risen Lord, was a necessary qualification for the apostolate. That is one reason why there are no apostles of Christ today – or at least none with an authority comparable to that of the Twelve and Paul.

An extraordinary inspiration by the Holy Spirit

All believers have of course received the Holy Spirit. We believe Romans 8:9 that "if anybody does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." Nevertheless, in the upper room Jesus promised the apostles a special ministry of the Spirit. He said that the Spirit, when he came, would on the one hand remind them of what he had spoken to them (John 14:26), and on the other lead them into all truth (John 16:13). Now the "you" in these verses has a very clear reference; Jesus is addressing his apostles. We cannot change the identity of the "you" in the middle of a sentence. So the Holy Spirit would remind them of what Jesus had said to them, and would supplement it with truth which he had not been able to say to them. These promises were primarily fulfilled in the writing of the Gospels (the reminding ministry) and the Epistles (the supplementing ministry). As Martin Luther put it in his fine commentary on the Sermon on the Mount: "Jesus has submitted the whole world to the apostles, who are the only people who can enlighten it. All the peoples of the world – kings, princes, lords, educated men, wise men – must sit down while the apostles stand up, and they must listen while the apostles speak."

In summary, then, our Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly endorsed the authority of the Old Testament by quoting it and submitting to it, and deliberately provided for the writing of the New Testament by appointing and equipping in different ways, bear the stamp of his endorsement. Therefore, if we want to submit to the authority of Jesus, we must submit to the authority of Scripture, because the authority of Scripture carries with it the authority of Jesus Christ.

The Implications of Biblical Authority

In conclusion, I want to show that submission to the authority of Scripture is not only reasonable in itself, but also wholesome in its consequences. It has at least three healthy results.

Firstly, it is the way of *mature discipleship*. I venture to say that it is not possible to be a mature disciple and

deny the authority of Scripture. For what is discipleship? One of its ingredients is worship, but we cannot worship God if we do not know what kind of God he is or what kind of worship he desires; and it is Scripture that tells us. Another ingredient of discipleship is faith, but we

How can we lead others into maturity in Christ if we do not teach them out of the Scriptures and if we are not ourselves assured of the authority of Scripture?

cannot grow in faith without some promises of God to grasp, and the promises of God are found in the Bible. Discipleship also involves obedience, but we cannot obey without commandments, God's commandments are found in Scripture. So I could go on. Every aspect of discipleship is a response to the Word of God. Therefore, the more confident we are in the authority of Scripture, the more it will be possible for us to grow into mature discipleship.

Secondly, submission to the authority of Scripture is the way to *effective service*. How can we lead others into maturity in Christ if we do not teach them out of the Scriptures and if we are not ourselves assured of the authority of Scripture? We will come to the preparation of our messages with expectation and will be conscientious in it, mainly because we know that we are handling nothing less than the Word of the Living God. With what meticulous care should we study Scripture, if it is indeed the Word of God!

Thirdly, it is the way of *Christian humility*. There is no quality more needed in the Church today than humility. We need to humble ourselves before Jesus as Lord, and sit like Mary at his feet listening eagerly to his Word. We need to remember what Jesus said to the apostles in the upper room, "You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am" (John 13:13). "Teacher" and "Lord" are not just courtesy titles; they bear witness to a reality. We have no liberty to disagree with our Teacher or to disobey our Lord.

Surely, this is the major issue for the Church today – whether Jesus is our Lord to teach and command us, or whether we behave as if we were the lord of Jesus. For then we will presume to edit and manipulate his teaching. We will wander through Scripture like a gardener in an herbaceous border, picking a flower here and discarding a flower there. But selective submission to Scripture

is not authentic submission. We can hardly claim to be converted if we are not intellectually and morally converted. To be intellectually converted is to bring our mind under the authority of Jesus' Lordship, and to be morally converted is to bring our will under his sovereign control. This is the humility to which we are called – to humble ourselves at the feet of Jesus, our Teacher and our Lord.



Sermon

The Message of the Cross

*Delivered in Miller Chapel, Princeton, NJ on
December 13, 2002 by Howard Griffin.*

Sermon Text : 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

What is the message of the cross? According to the apostle Paul, people who are perishing do not seem to believe the message of the cross; for them it is foolishness. For the skeptical Jew demands signs and the unbelieving Greek seeks wisdom, but we preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. However, to us who believe, who are being saved, for both the Jews and the Greeks who are called, Paul declares, the message of the cross is the power of God. But specifically, what is the message of the cross?

I remember when the message of the cross became most evident to me. During my sophomore year in college I was encouraged by my college minister to meet with his mentor, Baker Duncan. At six feet seven inches, with beady blue eyes, the owner of his own venture capitalist firm, Baker Duncan was a very intimidating 70 year old man. When I sat down in Baker's office for the first time, he sat across from me and leaned over and asked, "Howard, how well do you want to know me?" Wanting to assure Baker that I genuinely wanted to know him I said, "I would like to get to know you well."

"Give me a percentage Howard. Percentage wise how much do you want to know me?" Not wanting to seem disinterested, or unauthentic I boldly declared, "100%!"

"How well should I know you?"

I was beginning to regret my boldness. Sheepishly I replied, "I guess 100%?"

"Very well then, what is the most despicable thing you have ever done?"

I wasn't even sure this guy knew my middle name, and he wanted me to tell him what was the most despicable thing that I had ever done? I began to sweat and wrestle in my seat. How could I possibly answer his

question?

How would you answer this question? What is the most despicable thing you have ever done? Maybe you have killed someone, with your words. Maybe you have committed some sexual indiscretion, or you have returned evil for evil by slandering someone behind their back? Whatever your sin, the scriptures tell us that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

As I delayed in my answer that morning, Baker calmly said, "Howard, while you are thinking about your sin, here is mine," and Baker began to tell me what he considered to be his most despicable moment.

What shocked me that morning was not the despicable nature of his sin, but rather the peace in which he told his story. After confessing his sin, he explained that this incident was a mistake, he had confessed to God, repented, and God had forgiven him. I then felt encouraged to tell my story and share what I thought was my most despicable moment. After confessing my sin, Baker nodded his head and said, "Howard, when Jesus Christ died on the cross, did he pay the price for that sin?" With a calming realization of God's amazing grace I said, "Yes, yes Christ's death on the cross did pay the price for that sin."

The beautiful message of the cross is that that God loves us so much that He sent his only son to die on the cross for our sins, and in our text today Paul explains that because of this sacrifice, "we are being saved."

Notice that Paul uses the present tense to explain that, "we are being saved", not the past tense. It is true that we have been justified by Christ's death on the cross, an event that happened almost 2000 years ago, but Paul speaks in the present tense because salvation history has not ended. Christ has already died for our sins, but he has not yet returned. God's saving work is still being done today, and by looking at Paul we can see that a central part of this work is the continued proclamation of Jesus Christ and him crucified. For Paul tells us that those who do not believe "are perishing." Fortunately, they have not yet perished. Guided by the Holy Spirit,

Howard Griffin is an M. Div. Senior at Princeton Theological Seminary.

there is still an opportunity to let those who are perishing know the message of the cross, to let them know that God loves us so much that he was willing to send his only son to die on the cross for our sins.

This advent season as we celebrate the miracle of the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, we should not lose sight of the cross. For Christ did not come simply to be with us, but to guide us, and ultimately to die for us. As Jesus states in Mark 10:45, "For the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." Christ died for our sins as a sign of his great love for us.

Therefore, despite how foolish our message might seem to the world, guided by the Holy Spirit and following the example of Paul, we must continue to proclaim with boldness, Jesus Christ and him crucified.



Review

An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777–1880.

by Paul C. Gutjahr. Stanford University Press, 1999. 256 pp.

In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible.

by Peter J. Thuesen. Oxford University Press, 2002. 238 pp.

Reviewed by D. G. Hart

Readers of popular evangelical magazines could plausibly conclude that the historic Protestant conception of the authority and infallibility of the Bible is alive and well. Advertisements for Bibles in various translations and with differing annotations, along with commentaries, software programs, reference works, devotionals, and paraphernalia, testify to Protestantism's continuing allegiance to Scripture as the only source of divine guidance. Today's Bible industry would also appear to vindicate the Protestant Reformers' efforts to translate the word of God into the vernacular and make it available to a broad audience of lay believers. Testimonies to the Bible's uniqueness and popularity come in all forms, from the advertisement for a new translation that required "ninety leading Bible scholars laboring prayerfully for seven years to assure the accuracy and readability" of Scripture, to General George F. Patton's habit of reading the book "every goddamned day."

These two books challenge the apparent success of the Bible industry in America. Indeed, as Paul Gutjahr and Peter Thuesen show, scholarly criticism is just the beginning of Protestant worries when it comes to defending the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice. As a physical object, the Bible is never only the word of God, but comes mediated through the human hands of publishers, translators, editors, and booksellers. For this reason, efforts to prevent sinful humans from tampering with the pristine character of holy writ are futile. In the history of Bible publishing and translation, the Creator's word ends up depending on the words, hands, strength, and especially money of His creatures.

An American Bible is a particularly effective account of how matters as seemingly innocuous as bindings, covers, illustrations, and maps have had the ironic consequence of redirecting Protestant reverence for

Scripture. Gutjahr starts by demonstrating that the Bible, as a book, created an inherently contradictory dynamic within the marketplace of American publishing. For instance, the American Bible Society's laudable desire to furnish every home with a Bible established the book as the most accessible and influential among nineteenth-century readers. But the widespread availability of the good book required changes in print and distribution that made it increasingly cheap to produce and set in motion a competition among printers and publishers for the largest market. And one of the cultural contradictions that attended this form of capitalism was that an affordable Bible required publishers to look for packaging that would attract buyers. With the advent of niche marketing came Bibles designed for display in the parlor, Bibles with more expensive bindings, Bibles with better illustrations, Bibles with more comments, and Bibles with superior translations. This story of the Bible's publishing, packaging, and marketing allows Gutjahr to make the important point that the materiality of the book itself may have had the unintended effect of distracting readers from the Bible's very words.

Likewise, the Protestant desire to make the Bible influential in American public life resulted in a series of skirmishes for the soul of the nation's public schools. Most of what Gutjahr presents here concerning the nineteenth-century school wars is familiar terrain. Nevertheless, his telling of this story brilliantly reinforces his larger point about the way that the promotion of the Bible ended up undermining the book's pious advocates. In this particular case, not only did the debates about Bible reading in public schools show the growing numerical and political influence of Roman Catholicism in the United States, but the court battles that ensued diminished the Bible's status in the schools' curricula. As Gutjahr puts it, "a text that had provided the nation with a source of shared cultural memory and language for nearly two centuries would find itself increasingly 'ghetto-ized' among specific, more Protestant segments of the nation's population."

D. G. Hart is Academic Dean at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.

If *An American Bible* shows the unintended mess that Protestants made of the Bible's significance, *In Discordance with the Scriptures* details the ways that Protestant churchmen over the last 125 years have tried to put the genie of a vernacular Bible back in the bottle of one version that all Protestants would use. (By 1880, according to Gutjahr's count, Americans had nearly two thousand different editions of the Bible from which to choose.) The most notable results of the search for a commonly accepted English version of the Bible that would supersede the King James Version were the Revised Version (1881 for the New Testament; 1885 for the Old Testament) and the Revised Standard Version (1952). Thuesen's narrative explores more than these two versions, covering English Bible translations from William Tyndale to the New International, but the heart of his story is the effort by American Protestants to arrive at a definitive version.

Neither the Revised Version nor the Revised Standard Version succeeded in becoming the translation used by all American Protestants. Part of the reason for this failure was the rift that developed between mainline and evangelical Protestants over the last 125 years. But just as important—and this is the most significant point in Thuesen's argument—is the legacy of Protestantism's teaching on *sola scriptura*. In the late nineteenth century the contributors to the Revised Version believed that textual criticism could be used to arrive at the best translation. But the study of manuscripts inevitably raised questions about the history recorded in the text and so had the potential for creating doubts about the Bible's veracity and authority.

In the twentieth century the debates about the Bible escalated as Protestants recognized that even such simple matters as translation were bound up with interpretation. Consequently, evangelicals suspected the Revised Standard Version as a liberal Bible, and eventually countered with the New International Version, a translation produced by conservative scholars. Along the way, Protestants demonstrated what Catholics already knew—namely, that the Bible never stands alone but, even in its translation, is situated in a web of relationships that involve the authority of church leaders and questions about who has responsibility for determining orthodoxy.

These books, then, are sobering reading for Protestants. As soon as anyone reproduces the Bible for others to own and read, human agency becomes entangled with divine authority. The question is which person, institution, or scholar should be responsible for control-

ling access to the Bible.

That may be an indelicate way of putting the matter, especially for Protestants who think human authority of any kind should stay out of the way of divine revelation. But in? evitably someone takes charge, either the market (as Gutjahr shows) or churchmen (as Thuesen documents). One should not have to be Roman Catholic to sense that churches may be a more appropriate context than the market for supervising the reproduction of the Bible. But thanks to the American Protestant habits of Bible-only-ism and anticlericalism, most Protestants are so far removed from the wisdom of ecclesiology that they may need some instruction from their Catholic neighbors. Short of that, these books could well provide a useful guide to reflection.

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Finale

My (Trinitarian) Conversion

by Corey Widmer

“Doctors of arts, medicine, law and philosophy, can be made by the pope, the emperor, and the universities; but be quite sure that no one can make a doctor of Holy Scripture save only the Holy Ghost from heaven, as Christ says in John vi: ‘They must be taught of God himself’. Now the Holy Ghost does not ask after red or brown robes, or what is showy, nor whether a person is young or old, lay or clerical, monastic or secular, virgin or married. Indeed, He once spoke by an ass against the prophet that rode on it. Would God we were worthy that such doctors be given us.” Martin Luther

I used to believe the gospel was pretty manageable. Growing up, I was taught to make abundant use of small yellow tracts, which explained in four precise laws how the reader could gain a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Though I do not doubt the effectiveness of these tracts, and even witnessed examples of their positive use, the repetitive transmission of the language implemented in this literature developed in me a sense that the gospel was a simple, mechanical collection of rules that resulted in Christian belief. It was precise, controlled and capable of efficient communication. It was palatable to the mind and effectual for distribution. In short, holding the gospel in my hands within a few thin yellow pages, it seemed remarkably contained and marketable.

Looking back on those years, I can dimly perceive how my understanding of the gospel was formed more by my cultural position than by the biblical witness. My rationalistic view of the world, combined with a strict pragmatic individualism, truncated the fullness of the message. Obsequious to the assumptions of my culture, my mind directed me to a god that was compatible with its own pre-understanding. Consequentially, I gained not only a misconception of how God *works*, but also of who God *is*. God for me was a supreme transcendent

being, an immutable essence of power and incomprehensible glory. Jesus Christ was indeed God’s Son, but I understood him to be a mechanical and necessary extension of the gospel “rules” – as one whose suffering on the cross enabled the neat equation to function smoothly. The results of that gospel, as far as I understood them, entailed personal salvation, and to a large extent, personal fulfillment.

As I began to study the Bible more seriously, I started to realize that its claims were incompatible with my prior understanding. The bewildering claim of the Bible that God is not an “essence” but rather a community of Persons began to reorient my understanding of myself, the being of God and indeed reality. Whereas previously I saw the Trinity as a complicated conundrum that awkwardly confused my clear explanation of the gospel, I began to realize that the Trinity is in fact the essence of the gospel itself. All my former categories, bound together in reasonable, digestible parts, began to crumble away. Whereas previously I had believed that the gospel was a mechanical series of steps, I began to see the Christian message as the loving and gracious work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, acting in perfect unity in reconciling the fallen world to himself. While earlier in my life I had considered Jesus a “tool” that God implemented to bridge the gap between himself and the human race, I began to see Jesus as the most perfect revelation of the Godhead, who, in the power of the Holy Spirit, set the whole course of his life on bearing the judgment for sin in obedience to the Father. Whereas previously I understood the gospel to be a reasoned report of God’s activity that could be efficiently disseminated, I have gradually realized that the most faithful demonstration and proclamation of the gospel is carried out in loving community, bound up in relationships, emulating the communal God whom the gospel proclaims. Finally, where I had considered the fruits of the

Corey Widmer is an M. Div. Junior at Princeton Theological Seminary.

gospel as relating only to categories of personal salvation and fulfillment, I have begun to realize that the glory of the gospel lies in God's desire to "purify a *people* for himself" (Titus 2:14), and ultimately concerns his purpose to reconcile the whole cosmos to himself through Jesus Christ. The biblical claims slowly uprooted my rationalistic and individualistic tendencies, challenging me to critique my own cultural tradition and to re-center my understanding of the gospel on the basis of the Trinity. It is telling of the dramatic cultural influence on my way of thinking that a socio-critical self-examination, rooted in the Scriptures, resulted in a theological transformation.

A Chinese proverb says, "If you want a definition of water, don't ask a fish." Like the fish, I will never be able to fully discern the ways my culture influences my system of thought and belief. Nevertheless, I am one whose vision of reality the Scriptures have overturned, challenging my cultural assumptions and reorienting my relationship with the living God. I expect and hope that I will ever be in the process of having my pre-understandings challenged and changed by the Reality that is present in the world of the Bible.



Bibliography

Compiled by Antony Billington and John Pittard

The following bibliography is a selective list of books for readers who are interested in further exploring the issues surrounding the scriptural authority and interpretation. Many of these books deal directly with the hermeneutical challenges and possibilities posed by the notion of biblical authority, while others exemplify exciting biblical scholarship that is done with biblical authority as a starting point. (A similar list can also be found in the October, 2000 issue of the PTR.) We hope this serves as a helpful jumping off point.

Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000).

This engaging and accessible volume illustrates the different approaches to the historical Jesus taken by a "liberal" revisionist scholar (Borg) and by a historian who reaches more orthodox conclusions (Wright). The authors, who are friends even if they reach strikingly different conclusions, present opposing essays on a number of key questions about the life and significance of Jesus.

Janice Capel Anderson & Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

A good collection of essays which looks at some of the more recent approaches to biblical interpretation: reader-response criticism, deconstruction, feminist criticism, etc., all focused on Mark's Gospel.

Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

A standard evangelical work on the history of biblical interpretation.

D.A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge (eds.), *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), and *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

Two collections of essays on a range of subjects having a bearing on hermeneutics and related theological issues.

Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 2nd edn.).

A 'how to' book on hermeneutics which defines interpretive principles appropriate to the different types of literary genres in the Bible.

Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991).

A collection of essays from a New Testament scholar within the Pentecostal tradition. Several of them deal with the important issue of historical precedent and hermeneutics (for example, are the various 'givings' of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church normative for the church today?).

John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), and *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

Goldingay's basic thesis is that we should allow the models commended by Scripture itself to shape our understanding of the Bible. Such an approach, according to Goldingay, respects the Bible's own diversity and richness, as well as how its various genres function today for the believing community. The follow-up volume focuses on interpretation. It considers some of the major biblical genres, especially from the Old Testament.

Joel B. Green (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

A very good collection of essays, covering some of the 'newer' approaches to interpreting the Bible.

Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), and *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

Antony Billington is Lecturer in New Testament at London Bible College.

John Pittard is an M. Div. Junior at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Both books provide a valuable summary of various hermeneutical approaches and cover a wide range of issues in a relatively short compass, and in fairly non-technical language.

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996).

A compelling attempt to approach scripture as an authoritative text without squashing the tensions and differences within the canonical voices. Hays suggests that three focal images underlie the New Testament's diverse ethical teachings. After considering major historical approaches to Christian ethics, Hays demonstrates his own approach by applying these focal images and careful exegesis to five controversial case studies.

Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (Yale University Press, 1993).

Without sugarcoating Paul's often troubling interpretation and appropriation of scripture, Hays illuminates many Pauline texts by showing that his use of the Old Testament is more creative, more complex, and less capricious than many scholars would make it out to be. Concludes with a (seemingly) radical proposal of how scripture should read if we were to take seriously Paul's request to "Imitate me."

William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993).

An excellent text on biblical hermeneutics that examines various approaches to scriptural interpretation from an evangelical perspective.

Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Guide to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991).

This textbook from an evangelical scholar is divided into three sections: general hermeneutics (covering issues related to exegesis), genre analysis, and applied hermeneutics.

Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

Among other things, this Catholic scholar wrestles with the notion that scripture is both the Word of God – and thus sacred – and that it is also historically contextual – thus making our understanding of faith dependent upon the findings of historical criticism.

Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

Exhaustive, brilliant treatment of modern hermeneutics.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

While taking seriously postmodern thinkers who have challenged the basic assumptions involved in biblical interpretation, Vanhoozer carefully lays out a theological and philosophical case for the church's ability to uncover meaning in scripture and develop a biblical theology.

N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God, Volume I* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 3-144.

In this introduction to Wright's proposed six-volume work, Wright develops a critical realist approach to uncovering meaning in history, biblical interpretation, and theology. Includes an intriguing approach to hermeneutics which compares biblical authority to the authority of an unfinished Shakespearean play as actors improvise the incomplete final act.

N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God, Volume II* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

Monumental work which outlines in detail the historical argument that Jesus did indeed conceive of himself as the Messiah ushering in a new kingdom. More than simply undercutting more skeptical reconstructions of the historical Jesus, Wright's careful portrayal of the New Testament context promises to challenge and reshape many notions about the New Testament that Christians have taken for granted.

Frances Young, *Virtuoso Theology: The Bible and Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

Young develops some creative perspectives on biblical hermeneutics by comparing the Bible to a classical musical composition and our interpretation as an improvisational "cadenza." Young argues that this analogy can help clarify why biblical interpretation must necessarily involve some indeterminacy, but that this does not negate our ability to place constraints on possible meaning and distinguish between faithful and less faithful renderings of the text.



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